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ABSTRACT

This Digest provides guidance in helping parents and teachers judge the quality of health education resources and identify sources of appropriate materials. Sources of information about children's health include: university and community libraries, professional organizations and agencies, and the World Wide Web. Guidelines for judging content accuracy include: verifying the credibility of the publisher or source of the materials; reviewing the author's credentials; using one's own knowledge in recognizing misinformation; viewing with skepticism materials containing claims that sound too good to be true; and considering content appropriateness as well as timeliness. Teachers must be especially attentive to formats that are easily integrated into the classroom routine and curriculum, are culturally relevant, and are adaptable for students with special needs. A list of professional organizations, agencies, and Internet sites for health learning resources is included. (Contains eight references.) (LL)

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IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING CHILDREN'S HEALTH RESOURCES

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by

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Identifying and Evaluating Children's Health Resources

Marilyn S. Massey and Charlotte M. Hendricks

Parents and teachers partner to teach young children about their health and to provide opportunities develop a knowledge and skills base that is the foundation for future health and lifestyle decisions. Parents and teachers need accurate, timely, and developmentally appropriate materials, including books, songs, videos, and instructions for hands-on activities, that help children learn key health concepts.

Not all health education materials are appropriate for all audiences. The format, content, reading level, or location can limit the appropriateness or effectiveness of materials for some populations. Inaccurate materials may even endanger a child. The purpose of this Digest is to provide guidance in helping parents and teachers judge the quality of health education resources and identify sources of appropriate materials.

Where to Locate Health Resources for Children

Libraries. Many important sources of information about children's health can be accessed through libraries. Most university and some community libraries have computer databases that allow an individual to search for topics of interest. Databases that cover children's health include ERIC, Medline, and PsycINFO. Also, libraries have paper indexes (e.g., *Child Development Abstracts and Bibliography*, and *Family Index*), reference works (e.g., *Childhood Information Sources* and *Resources for Early Childhood*), and children's literature. Reference librarians can help locate information from these and other sources.

Professional Organizations and National Organizations/Agencies. Many national organizations publish outstanding health resources for children. Examples include: *Hip on Health* and *Tell Me About AIDS* (American School Health Association); *HIV Prevention Education for Teachers of Elementary and Middle School Grades* (American Association for Health Education); *Children Riding on Sidewalks Safely* and *Walk in Traffic Safely* (National Association for the Education of Young Children); *Family Shopping Guide to Car Seats and Parenting Guides* (American Academy of Pediatrics); *5 A Day Adventures* (Dole); *Learn Not to Burn* (National Fire Protection Association); *Nutrition Education Materials Catalog* (National Dairy Council); and *Sesame Street Lead Away!* (National Safety Council). Several organizations are listed before the reference section in this Digest, and many others are cited in school health education textbooks (see Gilbert & Sawyer, 1995; Meeks, Heit, & Page, 1996).

Internet. There is a worldwide repository of information available to anyone with access to an Internet connection and a graphical browser for accessing the World Wide Web (WWW). Two health specific search engines are Health Explorer (http://www.healthexplorer.com) and Yahoo Health Directory (http://www.yahoo.com/health). On-line resources that can be helpful in learning more about the Internet include:

- *The Help Web* (http://www.imagescape.com/helpweb)
- *About the Internet* (http://home.netscape.com/assist/about_the_internet.html)
- *UCLA Libraries*- Instructional Resources on the Internet (http://www.library.ucla.edu/instruc/remote.htm#internet)

There are a number of credible Internet sites that deal with children's health. Ritzel (1996) supplies addresses for sites relating to safety education and injury prevention. In addition, most national health and education organizations/agencies have WWW sites that provide links with children's health-related resources (see list before the reference section). For tips on evaluating credible sites, see Pealer and Dorman (1997).

Evaluating Content

One guideline for judging content accuracy is to verify the credibility of the publisher or the source of the materials. For example, a media advertisement about a health product is primarily intended to sell the product, not to deliver health information. However, materials produced by well-known professional organizations have education as a purpose and have been thoroughly reviewed by experts.

A related guideline is to review the author's credentials. While an author's credentials such as MD (Medical Doctor), RN (Registered Nurse), CHES (Certified Health Education Specialist), or RD (Registered Dietitian) do not guarantee the accuracy or appropriateness of materials, they do indicate the author has had formal training in a particular health-related field. One's own knowledge is also helpful in judging accuracy and in recognizing misinformation. For example, many adults know that aspirin is not recommended for children's fever because of the potential for developing Reye's Syndrome. Therefore, an article or book that recommends aspirin as a child's fever reducer is likely to contain other errors as well. Likewise, because it is well known that helmets help prevent head injury, one should not use a children's video that depicts people riding bicycles without helmets.

View with skepticism materials containing claims that sound too good to be true. Materials promoting unusual diets or health regimens should be verifiable—avoid those that do not include a bibliography of references that actually relate to the subject, cite resources other than the author, and provide background information detailed enough to verify claims.

Also consider content appropriateness to assure the material meets the needs and interests of the target audience. Guidelines are available to assist parents and teachers in dealing with sensitive subjects like HIV and AIDS, alcohol and other drugs, human sexuality, depression, and suicide (see Kerr, Allensworth, & Gayle, 1991; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1988).

Health content must be current. Some

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information does not change over time (e.g., milk and dairy products contain calcium). However, information such as child safety has changed dramatically in the last decade. Wearing helmets and other protective gear when bike riding or roller blading is not only recommended, but, in some states, required. To judge whether health materials are current, look at the copyright date, which indicates date of publication. Because the health information knowledge base changes rapidly, some health materials are outdated in one to three years. However, as with accuracy, one should review health materials to determine if they adhere to current recommendations in child health, safety, and education.

After identifying several health resources that seem appropriate, reliable, and current, there are experts in the community that a person can consult to answer questions and/or clarify information. Health educators at local universities, hospitals, or health departments; pediatricians, dentists, or nurses; or staff of national health organizations that have local chapters, such as American Heart Association and American Cancer Society, are often willing to share their expertise.

Choosing Format. Teachers need health education materials that are easily integrated into their classroom routine and curriculum, are culturally relevant, and adapt easily for students with special needs. Children's literature is an effective medium for teaching health concepts and Miller, Telljohann, and Symons (1996) suggest such with themes related to self-esteem, personal health, safety education, alcohol and other drug prevention, nutrition, environmental health, aging, death, HIV/AIDS, and sexuality.

First-rate children's health resources are of utmost importance to parents, teachers, and anyone who cares about the well-being of children. Through teaching children about health and by helping them to experience physical, mental, and social well-being, parents and teachers can wisely invest in the nation's future.

ProfessionalOrganizationsand National Organizations/Agencies

• *American Academy of Pediatrics* (AAP), 141 Northwest Point Blvd, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007; (847) 228-5005; (http://www.aap.org).

• *American Association for Health Education* (AAHE), 1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1599; (703) 476-3437; (800) 213-7193; (http://www.aahperd.org/aahe/aahe.html).

• *American Cancer Society*; (800) ACS-2345; (offices in every state); (http://www.cancer.org).

• *American Heart Association*; (800) 242-1793; (offices in every state); (http://www.amhrt.org).

• *American School Health Association* (ASHA), PO Box 708, Kent, OH 44240-0708; (330) 678-1601.

• *Children's Safety Network*, Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02158; (617) 969-7101 x. 2207; (http://www.edc.org/HHD/csn/).

• *Dole Food Company, Inc.*, 15/5 Bovet, Suite 476, San Mateo, CA 94402; (415) 570-4378; (http://www.dole5aday.com).

• *Food and Nutrition Information Center*, USDA, National Agricultural Library, Room 304, 10301 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville, MD 20705; (301) 504-5719; (http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic).

• *healthfinder™*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gateway to federal health informationonline (http://www.healthfinder.gov).

• *Healthy CHILDcare Magazine*, Healthy Child Publications, P.O. Box 624, Harbor Springs, MI 49740.

• *National Association for the Education of Young Children* (NAEYC), 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1426; (202) 232-8777; (800) 424-2460; (http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc).

• *National Dairy Council*, 10255 W. Higgins Rd. Suite 900, Rosemont, IL 60018-5616; (708) 803-2000; (800) 426-8271.

• *National Fire Protection Association*, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02269; (617) 770-3000; (800) 344-3555; (http://www.nfpa.org/).

• *National Parent Information Network*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois, 51 Gerty Dr., Urbana, IL 61801; (217) 333-1386; (800) 583-4135; (http://ousd.k12.ca.us/netday/links/Partnerships/npinhome.html).

• *National Safe Kids Campaign*, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 662-0600; (http://www.safekids.org/).

• *National Safety Council*, 1121 Spring Lake Drive, Itasca, IL 60143; (630) 285-1121; (http://www.nsc.org/index.htm).

Internet Sites for Health Learning Resources

• *The Awesome Library* (http://www.neat-schoolhouse.org/health.html)

• *Blue Web'n* (www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluewebn/#table)

References

References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; most documents (ED) are available in microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC.

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